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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 000183

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SUBJECT: UZBEK LEGAL REFORM CONFERENCE TO DRAW "POWER  
MINISTERS"

REF: TASHKENT 79

Classified By: Poloff Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Government of Uzbekistan agreed to substantially upgrade the scope of an upcoming March conference on law enforcement and human rights. The two-day conference is being organized by the USAID-funded Open Dialogue Project in conjunction with Eastern Kentucky University, the Institute for New Democracies, and the state-controlled Foundation for Regional Policy of Uzbekistan. The Government of Uzbekistan added an additional two-day "side program" in which visiting experts will interact with numerous high-level officials. The expansion of the conference-related activities to include high-level participation from multiple ministries is unexpected but welcome, especially given the sensitive subjects on the agenda. We believe the Government of Uzbekistan will use this as a platform to draw attention to human rights steps in advance of expected sanctions debates in Europe and the United States this spring. The Government's willingness to engage at a high level in this type of forum illustrates the value of our financial assistance to non governmental organizations like the Open Dialogue Project. End summary.

Conference Agenda  
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¶2. (SBU) Mjusa Sever, Director of the USAID-funded Open Dialogue Project, previously informed post about the agenda for the March 5-6 conference in Tashkent entitled "Law Enforcement, Human Rights, and Global Security," which will feature discussions on: protecting human rights in the age of terrorism; the relationship between investigators, prosecutors, and judges (with a focus on implementation of a recently passed "habeas corpus" law in Uzbekistan); community

policing; forensic investigations; and dealing with conflict.

Conference sponsors also include Eastern Kentucky University, the Institute for New Democracies, and the state-controlled Foundation for Regional Policy of Uzbekistan. The Ambassador accepted an invitation to deliver a keynote address during the conference, and Sever suggested participation of several Uzbek Deputy Minister-level officials from the National Security Service and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

#### Uzbeks Upgrade the Scope of Events....

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¶3. (C) Sever noted that Open Dialogue requested a "side program" for the visiting experts from Europe and America during their visit, to which the Government of Uzbekistan quickly and favorably responded. The Uzbeks proposed two full days of events on March 3-4 to precede the main two-day conference agenda. This will provide a more extensive opportunity for visiting experts to interact with Government of Uzbekistan officials and increase their familiarity with the issues before the conference itself. In addition, the Uzbek side added a working excursion to Bukhara on March 7 that will include two events with local law enforcement officials in Bukhara City. The result will be a full week of interaction between Western law enforcement and democracy experts and Uzbek interlocutors on important subject matters.

The Government of Uzbekistan has developed a measure of trust with Sever and the Open Dialogue Project, and she reports that Uzbek officials "are being extremely cooperative" in helping with the event. Per reftel, Open Dialogue Project and the quazi-governmental Regional Policy Foundation are also planning a regional security conference

in May. Sever, who has often worked on short-term visas, just received a visa valid through the end of the year.

#### ...and the Level of Participation

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¶4. (C) In its expanded agenda delivered on February 7 to Sever, the Government of Uzbekistan lists several influential Cabinet-level participants, including Minister of Justice Ravshan Mukhitdinov; Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court Goziev; Minister of Internal Affairs Bakhodir Matlyubov; Prosecutor-General Rashidjon Kadirov; and First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilhomjon Nematov. Each will participate in round-table discussions and "working meetings" on March 3-4 with visiting international legal and democracy experts from the United States, Slovenia, France, and the United Kingdom.

#### Comment

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¶5. (C) The Government of Uzbekistan is fielding an impressive, star-studded lineup for this conference, and it will likely use the occasion as a platform to tout recent steps forward on human rights -- a new "habeas corpus" law (it provides a legal basis for increased judicial independence and defendants' rights), abolition of the death penalty, and amnesty of some political prisoners. The Government of Uzbekistan's comfort level in working with Sever and the Open Dialogue Project as an honest broker in setting up this type of conference format is significant. U.S. financial support for the Open Dialogue Project during difficult years in the relationship may be paying dividends. Nevertheless, our challenge will be to parlay recent steps forward on certain individual cases (amnesties of political prisoners) into the next phase in our efforts to promote systematic progress on human rights: greater transparency and the ability of non governmental organizations (both Uzbek and foreign) to operate inside Uzbekistan.

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